

BLM Nevada Tri-RAC Meeting Transcript February 6, 2014 Elko, Nevada

Segment 1: State Director Remarks, Resources Update on Drought, Wild Horses and Burros and Sage Grouse

>> So, good morning, everyone.

My name is Amy Lueders, for those of you who don't know, State Director of the Bureau of Land Management in Nevada and I appreciate the opportunity to get to visit with you at the Tri RAC where once a year all of the Resource Advisory Council members come together.

I really appreciate it.

I wanted to start with this slide, and I have lost my prop already.

I will get in trouble for stepping outside the box by Art, I know it.

These pictures here are from the calendar that we put together that all of you have on your desk, and this was a photo contest that we had in terms of people putting together pictures of the public lands in celebration of Nevada's sesquicentennial and we are celebrating this year.

So I think this does a great job recognizing the diversity of the public lands that we manage here in Nevada, and in many ways, a reflection of the Resource Advisory Councils, of the diverse interests and backgrounds that you all bring that really match the diversity of the lands that we manage.

So I hope you will enjoy this and it will remind you of why we are all in this in terms of the public land issues.

So, I appreciate that everyone came a long way.

We have people that have made a long trip to get here and I appreciate the time particularly for all of you, all of the time that you volunteer to help advise us on these very complicated issues that we have in managing the lands for the public.

So I wanted to spend a little time talking about some of the priorities and my vision for the BLM for 2014.

For me in terms of how we make decisions and what we work on, these are the kind of goals and visions that guide me and the team that I have.

So it's leaving the resources better than we found them.

We should be judging our actions against that.

Think big and manage across broad landscapes, and that requires us to work with our neighbors and look across state lines and work with many other folks, because the landscapes don't know a district boundary or public lands, BLM managed lands.

So it's very important that we think big.

We're going to make courageous decisions wisely.

We're not going to be the generation that kicks hard decisions down the road.

We're going to tackle those difficult issues because we have the right folks and the folks of the RAC to help advise us on those decisions.

And then lastly, ensure our processes are efficient, transparent and consistent.

It's important to me that we look to do things the best way that we look about not adding additional hurdles, and it's important for our customers and our stakeholders that regardless of where they are, those processes are consistent.

So that's a big issue for me also.

I'm going to talk about some of these programs.

I'm going to talk about fire, minerals, grazing, drought, tortoise.

You can read them.

Some of these will be talked in more detail with Raul comes up after me.

So I'll give a highlight of these issues.

In 2013 I'd say we had a good fire season.

Good to me means not many acres.

So you'll notice on BLM, less than 100,000 acres burned in 2013, and across Nevada significantly lower than the previous year.

I think we were both good and lucky.

We have a tremendously dedicated and well trained fire staff.

We have done a lot of work in terms of prepositioning resources and ensuring we have resources in the right place at the right time.

And we were also fortunate this year to not have a lot of those large fire multiple start days.

So on minerals, it's probably no surprise to any of you, we have the largest mining program in the Bureau of Land Management, and I think Nevada represents about half of the entire Bureau's workload in minerals.

We have more than half nearly half of the Bureau's mining claims.

We have more than \$2 billion in bonds that we hold to ensure that we're not leaving a long term liability for future generations to deal with.

We have a very large sand and gravel program.

And we're continuing to use our mine permitting teams to have more consistency and efficiency in permitting operations, and it's important that we are both consistent and efficient, but also that the outcome leads to projects that are not that are environmentally sound.

So that's some of the important pieces of the mine permitting review team.

Certainly the very history of Nevada, and we are celebrating its 150th year of statehood this year, mining is a very big part of that history.

With that history comes the historical issue of abandoned mine land.

We have the largest program in the agency.

We have a tremendous partnership in place to address this.

And really have done an amazing job of inventorying sites and most importantly closing sites to ensure that we are not creating health and safety issues.

Certainly I know the Northeast RAC has spent time this year talking about oil and gas.

We're not what you call in Nevada one of the OPEC states or one of the large oil and gas producing states.

As a matter of fact we're one of the lowest oil and gas producing states in the country.

We do have four lease sales a year.

We have generated in 2012 over \$11 million from lease sales and rentals, and I think everyone is aware there was a new interest in Elko county oil and gas exploration.

In renewable energy, we did have the solar programmatic Environmental Impact Statement signed in 2012.

These established Solar Energy Zones, which were areas where the potentials for solar was high and the resource conflicts were low, and really were about putting renewable energy in the best places in terms of having economic value but having low environmental impacts.

We have five Solar Energy Zones in Nevada and we've been doing quite a lot with them.

We were the first to develop the Dry Lake solar energy mitigation plan.

That was the first mitigation plan done for a Solar Energy Zone.

We are now working on one for Dry Lake north in terms of the mitigation plan.

We are also going to be looking this year at having a competitive process within the Dry Lake Solar Energy Zone.

We have a lot of interest in that zone in making that available for competition.

We have a number of projects ongoing... five solar projects, one wind project, two geothermal projects, and I think what we saw this year is we started to see demand flattening out and that was largely driven by the market.

I think people in California sort of said, we've got enough for now, and so people were trying to figure out the market piece, couldn't get power purchase agreements, and as a result couldn't get financing.

We started to see this year little uptick in terms of interest on renewable energy, I think largely driven by legislation that was passed in in the last legislative session that will lead to additional demand within Nevada for renewable energy.

So we're starting to see a little uptick, which I think aligns really perfectly with our work in the Dry Lake beds.

In BLM Nevada we have 663 grazing authorizations.

Some of the priorities for us are renewing grazing permits, assessing rangeland health, ensuring that grazing use is in accordance with the Rangeland Health Standards, and developing a statewide permit renewal/issuance process.

Certainly for us we have not been sort of keeping up where we want to be in terms of the permit/renewal and as I said we want to make sure we have consistent and efficient processes, so one of the areas we have been focusing this year is just that, how do we have additional accomplishments and how do we do that in a more consistent and efficient way.

We pay the state about \$200,000 a year in grazing receipts, and here are some of our accomplishments for 2013.

It's certainly no surprise to anyone who drove here or anyone who lives in Nevada, drought is an ongoing issue for us across the state.

We're in the third year of significant drought, and you'll certainly be hearing more about drought from Raul in his presentation.

Really, I think, giving you a good context of where we're at relative to past year and how significant this issue is for the state.

We're continuing certainly one every our focus areas this year because of the severity and continuance of drought, we've been focused on monitoring range conditions, working with permittees to identify

voluntary actions, and you'll see we really had great partnership with our permittees this past year in terms of taking voluntary nonuse.

And certainly making sure that we are educating people about drought and what it means.

We did last year identify and develop kind of an outreach strategy, our plans, what steps we were going to take so we had a very transparent and consistent process in how we were addressing drought.

For those in the south, desert tortoise continues to be a big issue.

In 2014 two of our priorities are going to be use the best available science and it has been a lot of evolution in terms of the science that is available to us to make decisions that affect the tortoise, particularly its habitat, and particularly connectivity issues, which I think we didn't have as much information on in the past and is a really important issue for us.

Our second one is to work with partners to develop a strategy to cease taking unwanted captive tortoise into the desert tortoise conservation center that we manage in Southern Nevada.

We're working in partnership with many of our Federal and state agencies and nonprofits on that.

In if you haven't heard sage grouse, where have you been?

It's certainly a big issue for many of the folks across the West, across the range, and certainly here within Nevada.

A lot of folks have invested a lot of energy working on sage grouse.

Clearly one of the important things that we've been working on is our plan amendments.

I certainly appreciate the comments that we received from both the Northeast and northwest RACs in terms of that were submitted during the public comment period and I appreciate the investment of time that you put into preparing those for us.

It did close on January 29th.

We received over 15,000 comments.

Clearly a number of those were form letters.

But we received really a lot of substantive, deep comments that we are currently working through.

So that is going to be one of our focuses, is pulling that together.

We've been working very closely with the state and the sagebrush ecosystem council as they've continued to revise the state plan and so there is certainly a lot going on both at the planning level but also at kind of the project level and I think some of our challenges will be once we get the planning effort done, as hard as it is, the implementation will be even harder.

Certainly an area where I think the RAC can help guide us in terms of priorities as we implement wherever we end up with the Land Use Plan.

We also had the Bi State plan amendment that we did also in cooperation with the Forest Service.

That affects both the Carson City and Tonapah offices.

The Forest Service is taking the lead on that plan amendment.

The public comment period closed on that draft, and we received about 170 comments.

We really are at a pivotal moment, I think, within Nevada in terms of our Land Use Planning efforts, and I don't think there's ever been a time where we have had so much of the state undergoing plan revisions, and it is a really important place for the RACs and also the public to engage because we are fundamentally defining what public land management looks like on probably half of the state right now, and so what land management looks like on those public lands for the next 10 to 20 years is something that you all have an opportunity to be a part of, and it's a huge amount of work as we look. I know the northwest RAC was engaged in the Winnemucca RMP.

We're close to having the protest resolution, I hope, on that.

We're also working on the Las Vegas, Battle Mountain and Carson City RMPs, so that's a significant part of the state that impacts all three RACs.

So it's a really tremendous opportunity, and getting it right is really important, because, as I said, it really defines what public land management looks like for the next couple decades.

And then there's some accomplishments. We have a lot to be proud of.

We have a lot to be proud of in terms of the work of BLM employees, in terms of the partners that we have, and so we're really I wanted to highlight just a few of them.

There are so many.

One is completing the draft EIS for sage grouse.

That was a huge lift.

Took the investment of a lot of people's time and certainly our work is not done but getting to that milestone was very significant.

We opened the seed warehouse in Ely and I think Rosie and her team, what a tremendous assess to have.

We're so fortunate to have that here in Nevada.

And it's part of a national strategy that allows us to have more flexibility and more capacity to address not just our fire restoration needs, but more proactive restoration work, and so it really increases our flexibility as a Bureau and increases our flexibility here within Nevada.

Just a couple weeks ago we had Battle Mountain and our partners with UNR co op extension win the Secretary's conservation award for the Bootstraps program.

It's a tremendous program that Rod Davis heads out of UNR co op extension that not only gets terrific work done on the ground but really provides opportunities and life skills for at risk youth, and I'm very, very proud to be part of that program.

We also have the Vegas Valley veteran hand crew in Southern Nevada.

We were the first state within BLM to stand up a veteran hand crew.

For those of you who haven't met them, they are a tremendous bunch of veterans who do tremendous work for us across the nation.

They this year won the Pulaski award, which is an interagency fire award for teamwork, and I can't think of a more deserving bunch to receive that award.

Everywhere they go they get glowing reviews in terms of the hard work and the great work that they do, and it's a tremendous I really encourage you to visit with them and what a great opportunity it provides for them and for us.

And then we also completed the supplemental EIS for the Ruby pipeline.

I know many in the Northwest were involved in the Ruby project and we continue to ensure not only we've done the EIS but to ensure reclamation is occurring on the ground.

So those are just a quick overview of some of the things we have going on.

Hopefully might give you some thoughts in terms of things as you do your breakouts over the next day and a half of areas where you might want to focus, and some of the things I'm particularly proud of and that I hope we can be tackling in the coming year.

So any questions for me before I turn it to Raul?

We want to make sure you have a mic.

>> Kind of a specific question, but out of the 11.3 million that you guys received in oil and gas for 2013, how much stayed within the state and does any money stay within the districts of the sale?

>> So I think, is it half, Gary? So half of what we receive, half goes to the state.

>> To your office

>> No, to the State of Nevada.

>> And then the other half just goes to the treasury?

>> Yes.

>> Thank you.

>> Uh huh.

>> I'm seeing on the Internet that the number of organizations that posted sage grouse comments have been extended to February 15th.

Is that correct?

>> No.

So I think there's been a lot of confusion there are a lot of dates going on.

So I think the February 15th is the Fish & Wildlife Service comments on the Bi State proposed listing decision.

Do I have that right, Raul?

Yeah.

The 10th so February 10th is the date that was extended Fish & Wildlife Service's comment period on the proposed decision to list the Bi State population as threatened.

Any other questions before I turn it to Raul?

I look forward to visiting with you over the next day and a half.

I will be here until we conclude tomorrow.

So I look forward to catching up with those of you I've met before and those I haven't.

So thanks, everyone, for coming, and I look forward to having a good day and a half.

[applause]

>> Just a reminder so when we get questions to get a mic.

How do we want to start I guess I'll do this.

>> Tom Connolly, Northeast RAC representing grazing.

>> Jeff White, chair, Northeast RAC, representing energy and minerals.

>> Kevin Lee, Northeast RAC, transportation right of way.

>> Hughes, Northeast RAC, dispersed recreation.



>> Larry Hyslop, Northeast RAC, environment.

>> Dave Pierce, Northeast RAC, energy and minerals.

>> Jack Prier, Northeast RAC, environment and wildlife.

>> Jeannie Nations, wild horse and burros, Northeast RAC.

>> Doug Furtado, District Manager, Battle Mountain district.

>> David Meisner representing academia.

>> Tanya Reynolds, Native American interests.

>> Good morning, Laurie Carson representing elected or officials Northeast RAC.

>> Good morning, I'm Jill Silvey, I'm the Elko District Manager for BLM.

>> Good morning, Rosie Thomas.

I was the designated Federal official last year with the MOSO and the incoming designated Federal official for Northeast RAC.

So I'm really not a traitor.

And District Manager Ely district.

>> Megan Brown representing Congressman Mark Amodei

>> Stretch Baker warrior Mojave southern RAC.

>> Mike Carter, associate District Manager Ely district recently trade to the MOSO RAC.

>> Tim Smith, District Manager Southern Nevada and designated Federal official for the MOSO RAC.

>> Jason Higgins, MOSO RAC chair, energy and mineral development.

>> Robert Adams, MOSO RAC, representing organized recreation.

>> Tim Coward, Field Manager for the Tonapah Field Office.

>> Mark Smith, Southern Nevada District office.

>> Hillerie Patton, RAC coordinator for MOSO.

>> Good morning, Lisa Ross, Carson City district PAO.

>> Lesli Ellis Wouters and I'm the RAC coordinator for northeastern RAC.

>> Good morning, my name is Lucas.

I'm with senator reid's office.

>> Good morning, Gary Johnson, deputy State Director for minerals.

>> Erica, communications chief, BLM Nevada.

>> Everybody's going to see me.

My name is Kurt, nominee for the Southern Nevada RAC.

>> Ron Cherry, representing public at large, Sierra Front RAC.

>> Ray Hendrix, Sierra Front RAC representing grazing.

>> Willie Molini Sierra Front RAC representing wildlife.

>> Andy Hart Sierra Front RAC representing recreation.

>> Tim.

>> Debbie Lassiter Sierra Front chair representing energy and minerals.

>> Tom Hogan, Sierra Front RAC, academia, Great Basin college.

>> David Von Seggern Sierra Front RAC representing environment.

>> Mark Freese, Sierra Front RAC representing state agency.

>> Craig Young on the Sierra Front, cultural resources and historical resources.

>> Good morning, I'm Bernadette Lovato, I'm the Carson City District Manager and it's my first Tri RAC so I am looking forward to meeting more of the RAC members and it's really good to see the Sierra Front northwestern RAC members here.

>> Good morning, Matt Gingerich, RAC representing right of way and transportation.

>> Samuel Crampton, Senator Dean Heller.

>> That was very good.

Good morning, everyone.

My name is Raul Morales, Deputy State Director for resources, lands and planning with the Nevada State Office and I've been here a couple times talking to you about similar projects oh, I'm on.

Thank you.

These issues I'm going to talk about, I talked to you guys about in the past.

Some is going to be familiar but it's going to be more updated because we are a year further down the road.

I have four topics.

We're going to go through drought and sage grouse.

I do have a question period after each topic.

I know we've got an hour.

So we'll just kind of monitor that. Chris, maybe you can help me out with that and make sure I don't spend too much time on one topic.

I will be around throughout the course of the day.

If there are additional questions that would be great.

So drought, before we hit the first slide, let's talk about the good news on drought.

One, two, three.

It's precipitation in Nevada.

Okay.

Yea.

We are getting some snow.

Looks like we are getting some rain.

That's good.

We'll take any kind of moisture we can get.

Now let's talk about the big story.

Why has it been so dry in Nevada and across the West?

In weatherman's terms we had this big dome shield because of high pressure centered over the west and what this dome shield is doing is it's forcing storms to go over to the north or stay out to the coast where they dissipate, and I've been watching the weather, our friends to the central United States and Eastern United States have been taking brunt of this dome.

It's been really tough on them.

We have been basically experiencing dry, mild winter so far this year.

So some of the current events, recent current events, January this year, 2014, NRCS said we have a limited water supply predicted for the Western United States.

NOAA prediction center calls for a milder and somewhat drier winter.

Also in 2014 all counties in Nevada were declared emergencies.

Which means they will be eligible for drought assistance, and basically most of the western states are also in similar conditions at this point in time, even including Hawaii.

Recent article in the "New York Times" this week predicted that this is going to be the worst drought in 500 years in the United States.

Coming close to home, it was in the paper this week, there's only one spot in Northeast Nevada that's registering 100% percent of average snowpack this year and is that the Corral Canyon?

Do you remember that?

In the paper.

Okay.

You can see the rest of the information right there about the Owyhee River, Humboldt River, definitely below 100%.

Nevada is entering the third year of drought.

We're in the third year of drought.

So it's going to be a very tough year.

And we know the livestock operators and others are going to have to make some very difficult decisions about what to do with their operations this year and we know it's going to have a huge financial impact on them.

So this is a map of the United States.

The red and the brown basically show those counties within those states that are declared by the USDA emergency, meaning operators in those counties are eligible for some form of financial assistance to aid in that.

And in the case of Nevada, both the red and the yellow, two different designations, one is called the primary droughts and the others are contiguous counties under drought emergency.

All it means is there's different emergency aid under both of those categories but basically the whole State of Nevada falls in that category.

There you can see Hawaii.

Oops, back there.

You can see the drought looks like Kauai, if you want to visit a non drought island, Kauai is the place to go.

This map I just want to show kind of the picture across the West.

Obviously you can see the dark red blob, which is the extreme and exceptional droughts in California and Nevada.

You can see the extreme and exceptional drought categories across the United States in the west.

I want to particularly draw your attention to Oklahoma and Kansas.

That will relate to my horse discussion a little later.

Those are where we have a lot of long of term holding facilities for our horses, and so those folks that are taking care of the horses out there are also experiencing drought conditions, which is affecting horses out there, too.

I said we're in the third straight year of drought.

Over the past six years Nevada has had five drought years out of six.

So this isn't anything new for us, but what is new for us is the past few years have really been in that extreme and exceptional category.

What that means to the vegetative community that we're responsible for the management for is a lot of stress on those plants.

So those plants are not in a healthy condition, and we have a lot of animals, whether it's livestock, horses or wildlife, that are dependent on that vegetation for their survive, and so we have that responsibility to make sure that we are managing those vegetative resources properly and obviously in a drought it's tough for everyone.

So highlighting the past two years, this year, last time I showed you the map on the left hand side.

This is where we currently are on the right hand side.

The big point I want to point to you here is what I'm considering the really bad condition, the severe, extreme and exceptional droughts, we are right now at 80% of the state is in that category.

Last year we were at 56% of the state in that category.

If you look at the worst one, the exceptional we had zero% last year.

We're at 5% this year.

We can't spin it.

It is what it is.

But it's just not looking really good.

This map is kind of a breakdown of the counties that fit within those drought categories.

The exceptional, the extreme, the severe, and that's the moderates I don't even pay attention to that because it's not big what is that called anymore?

Moderate condition.

Kind amazing that Las Vegas is in the moderate condition class.

Just seems something is weird.

Here is the drought outlook between now and April of '14.

You'll see last year at this time more attention to the brook trout where the drought is to persist or intensify.

Last year that's what we looked like.

Nevada was in tough shape last year.

This year we're a little worse off.

But in particular what caught my attention is up here, the wet states are in a drought condition.

That's where we get a lot of our moisture from.

It's not coming in.

That dome has set up and is preventing even Washington and Oregon from being wetter than they usually are.

>> So what have we done over the past year?

I think many of you know we have completed drought management EAs in all of our offices except Elko.

Elko is in the process of completing theirs.

Their drought EA just went out a couple days ago for a two week comment period.

They will be done soon.

We know drought is not fair but BLM does have to proactively respond to droughts, and we have to do what's right for the land and the vegetation, and as Amy said, some of those things, we have to leave the landscape in better shape than we did and we have to make courageous decisions.

We in Nevada are leading out on what we think we need to do to proactively to protect resources for the long term.

Last year we got a lot of voluntary nonuse from livestock operators.

I want to applaud those individuals that did that and I'll show a little slide here of what happened last year with that, which is good.

Unfortunately we did have to issue nine decisions to permittees who did not want to take their cattle off or adjust accordingly to take care of the drought issues, and as Amy said, we will continue to protect the resources and that we will continue to seek voluntary nonuse this year.

That's imperative.

I know all our districts sent out drought letters to the permittees this year alerting them.

We will be looking for voluntary nonuse.

But we will have to issue decisions if necessary.

So this slide, just the difference in the past year basically.

In particular right here the grazing allotments with voluntary nonuse we had 41 in 2012.

I applaud that effort.

That's great.

I know a lot of people out there are interested in taking care of rangelands for future year.

Voluntary acres of reductions went from 2.2 to 17 million acres across the state.

And basically HMAs were also monitored.

Sage grouse areas were a priority for monitoring.

Both horse management areas and sage grouse areas will be a priority this year again as we monitor our rangelands.

The other point I want to make related to sage grouse is as far as some of the really complicating factors that drought is posing for us is when Fish & Wildlife Service makes their listing decision on the bird, how BLM addresses drought is going to be looked at very heavily.

And in particular we know we're going to go to litigation on the sage grouse plan, and when it goes before a judge, that issue will come up before the judge.

So we need to be able to show that we have been proactive, and when I say we, all of us collectively, really.

Not just BLM.

All that voluntary nonuse I think is positive to show what folks, our stakeholders are doing to help deal with the drought issue but we can't ignore droughts and we have to consider that in relation to the sage grouse.

What else are we going to be doing about drought in the year?

As I mentioned we'll continue voluntary nonuse requests of permittees.

Monitoring will be a high priority for Field Offices this year on droughts.

We will issue range decisions as necessary.

Wild horse and burro monitoring flights to assess animal and rangeland health will be a priority this year.

Outreach and education on drought will be ongoing.

And a lot of agencies are doing the outreach on drought.

It's not just BLM.

We're taking it very seriously and other agencies are taking it seriously as it relates to their mission.

Any questions on drought?

>> What [inaudible] practically relate for sage grouse relative to drought.

A permanent solution

>> The question is what are we proactively doing as it relates to sage grouse as it relates to drought?

Basically how we're addressing livestock grazing, the riparian areas.

Very important to birds.

When they have their chicks they head for water and meadows.

We're looking at protecting those areas.

Horses, you know, I'll talk more about that.



In the past that truly is a challenge for us.

At this point we have set up some standards in our RMP, Land Use Plan, sage grouse standards, land health standards that will kind of complement our Rangeland Health Standards.

We're adding that into the equation.

That will be part of the future as far as what we need to look at.

Those are some of the big things.

Anything anybody else is doing locally from the BLM?

Did I hit it?

That's good.

Any other questions?

>> I'm going to keep this mic.

I'm not very shy.

You talked about some of the drought in relation to other programs you have in the Midwest for holding for horses.

Obviously those are contracts and you guys can't move them to other places.

So are you guys going to be supplementing the contracts to pay for additional cost for hay or other things you guys are, and if you are, where is that money coming from in the budget?

>> That's a very good question.

The question is long term holding facilities in the Midwest for horses, how are we dealing with the needs to take care of those horses as it relates to drought, forage and the budget for it.

What we've been hearing over the past couple years from those contractors that have the horses on there is that their forage, their native grasses are being hurt by the drought.

They're not growing like they used to and they're having to supplemental feed more with hay than in the past and as a result of the drought the hay costs have gone up.

So we're at a point where a lot of those long term holding contracts are coming up for renewal in the month of March.

We're going out for proposals also to solicit additional long term holding capacity issues.

I guess we'll get a feel for the costs this go around on the contracts based on drought, based on cost of hay, based on interest to continue having horses in their facility.

What we're hearing is the cattle prices are such that some may decide they don't want to do horses and want to go into cattle.

These are things we are hearing at this point.

And we will know more come March what costs will be and what the desire to stay with horses will be, and our budget for this year, basically, is equivalent to last year's budget, but a good chunk, 60%, plus or minus, of that budget does go to the care and feeding of horses in long term facilities.

So it is putting a strain on our budget at this point.

>> Hi.

I was just wondering if you have any roundups scheduled for the year 2014 because of the drought?

>> I'll talk about that when I get into horses next.

I'll answer your question there.

>> Okay.

>> Any other drought related questions?

We'll go into horses.

Just a snapshot of where we're at with our horse populations at this point.

Nationally 37,000 horses on our public lands.

Nevada we're estimating between 22 and 25,000 horses.

Their Appropriate Management Level nationally is around 26,000 horses.

For Nevada we're about 12,600 animals as the Appropriate Management Level.

So you can see we're about double where we believe we should be and what the range can support.

84% of Nevada's HMAs are at or above AML at this point and 70 of the 83 HMAs are approximately double AML.

I believe I mentioned before wild horse and burro populations double about every four years.

One of the things we will be watching closely this year since we're in the third year of drought, is the foal crop going to be lower this year as a result of limited resources.

Last year I thought we might see some of that, but what I'm hearing from the field folks is our foal crop was kind of average for last year.

So want to watch that.

I know wild animals a lot of times when the environment gets tough typically have reduced, whether it's eggs laid, animals born, animals surviving.

We'll see how that works for horses this year.

What were removed last year, 2013?

In a nationally we removed 4200 horses.

Nevada removed 2700 or 2800 of those horses.

We treated about 509 mares, 46 in Nevada.

We adopted out 89 animals.

We didn't have any sales in Nevada last year.

As a result of the drought what we're noticing is wild horse and burros are moving outside their HMAs trying to find water and forage.

We've seen animals moving as much as 30 miles away from their HMAs and we're noticing this year we're seeing some horses on their summer ranges already.

National Academy of Science report, I think I reported to you last year we were waiting for this report.

It was done and completed, delivered to BLM late this summer.

BLM put a team of folks together to review the National Academy of Science report.

So we have kind of a report of our response to the NAS report.

It should be out soon, I'm told.

We haven't seen it yet.

At least I haven't seen it.

But they have a lot of recommendations on that report to BLM and I know one of the recommendations was that they did believe BLM was underestimating the number of horses out on the public lands.

So this year we are going to be applying a survey method that was requested or suggested in the NAS reports.

So we'll get an idea this year how our counts have been in the past in relation to this new survey method we'll be doing.

You know, one of the other things, big parts of the report, is that they were encouraging BLM to continue to work on partnerships across the local communities, a variety of partners and helping us develop where we need to go with the horses, and so that will be a big part that we'll be looking at.

And one of the other parts is part of the report is that population control was heavily discussed and that the Bureau of Land Management is going to go out for requests for proposals to help us deal with the population control.

We're really hoping to target the pharmaceutical companies.

Some of the other methods we've been doing, the one year PZP treatments and the five year treatments, the one year treatments has been very sporadic as far as effectiveness.

Got to do it at the right time.

The five year treatment at this point, early tests, are not conclusive that we can get a five year treatment on the mares.

So we're looking at going out to the pharmaceutical companies to see if there is some help there that they can provide us with coming up with some different tools to help control population growth on the range.

Again, just the drought map.

With the Herd Management Areas in the State of Nevada, basically a majority of the HMAs are in the severe to exceptional drought categories.

As I mentioned in the drought discussion, monitoring of HMAs in relation to drought is going to be a high priority for us.

Of course, a lot of those HMAs are also within sage grouse country.

So we'll be monitoring both of them.

Having this map helps us it's going to be beneficial for us to kind of prioritize our management actions as we move forward.

So what is BLM doing about the horses nationally?

As I mentioned earlier we're looking at new techniques for treating horses on the range to try to control growth.

We'll continue partnership with the USGS to improve that inventory method, the counting method I mentioned earlier.

We're going to be looking at how to determine an ecologically sustainable horses on rangelands.

We're above AML right now nationally.

If it turns out we are underestimating, I think we have a lot of work to make sure to see if we can actually sustain those animals on the range that we currently have.

Adoption program, adoptions have been low the past few years.

Economy has been tough.

You need some land.

Price of hay is high.

Those have probably all figured into low adoptions.

But we do think nationally we need to do a better job marketing horses for adoptions.

So we're going to be looking at that, and I'll talk about that from what Nevada is going to do here in a second.

And nationally we are exploring other opportunities with U.S. aid to maybe help adopt horses outside of the United States.

We also have a comprehensive animal welfare policy that will released soon this year.

Basically that tells us how we should be treating animals when we're doing gathers, again, assuring the health of the horses is taken into account as we do our gathers.

One other thing I wanted to say besides U.S. aid one of the other areas we are really exploring is trying to get more prisons interested in training horses like we have in Carson City and they have in Colorado.

We're finding that those prison trained horses when we adopt them out, they go really fast.

People seem to like horses that are already trained versus taking the wild animals.

So really exploring getting more horses into prisons across particularly the east and the south to try to bolster that opportunity for getting trained horses out to the public.

As far as Nevada, we're figuring out how to deal with limited to no gathers.

So your question for 2014 at this point, because of budgets, because of the fact our long term holding capacities are filled up, our short term, mid term holding facilities are filled up, we don't have opportunities for doing big gathers.

So we're looking at how do we address horses that are on the road, horses entering private ground, horses that are providing a public nuisance.

That's a small number of horses.

We're hoping we can at least place those horses into a facility if we can't adopt those horses out, and we're going to try to adopt those horses out.

That at this point, based on our budget, based on long and short term holding issues, will probably be the best we can do as far as removing horses off the range today.

Could change, but that's what we know today.

Water hauling, another big touchy topic.

You know, it's expensive.

Costs a lot of money to haul water.

And if we're just hauling water with no real reason to haul water, in other words, there has to be a bridge if we're hauling water for a reason to get horses from point A to point B, whether it's a turn in the climate or something that's going to allow them to survive, that makes sense to us, but we don't have a big budget to do that everywhere and we're anticipating with drought that's going to be a real challenge for us this year.

We're also going to work with our stakeholders.

So whether it's permittees or others who might be interested in hauling water, we're exploring those options right now to see if we can't do that.

So we just met last week.

We called in our wild horse summit in Nevada where we talked about all these issues, where we want to go, and so that was a topic we talked about, is watering horses, what can we do, who can help out with that, what is the goal.

If it doesn't really get us anywhere, we're talking about what does that mean, what does that look like, what should we do.

We know there will be a lot of interested people who don't want to see horses die and starving on the range.

Why aren't we watering horses?

A very emotional issue, for sure.

But we are confined by budgets.

We're discussing how to deal you know, how when we see declining animal health or declining rangeland health we're going to be talking about what actions we need to do when we spot that this year.

So that's going to be a big thing for us.

And then due to the drought and budget and holding capacity, like I say, we will be having to make some very tough choices without very good options.

So we're really not in a good place in Nevada.

I want to leave you with that with horses.

We're just not in a good place, and I liken it to a plate of food that you have on it and there's nothing really good on that plate and you're kind of looking at it and saying, "what do I do?"

You're going to have to eat something, and it's just not going to be what you like.

So we're expecting a tough year for horses this year.

Almost done and then we'll go to the questions.

Ecosanctuaries... talked a little about that last year.

We have three other states all on private ground, Montana, Wyoming, New Mexico, where we're looking at ecosanctuaries.

Total holding capacity for those three areas assuming they come on board is 900 horses.

The Save America's Mustangs ecosanctuary south of Elko, we got a letter about a month ago from SAM saying they want to withdraw from the EIS process.

We are in the process of getting ready to send them a letter asking them are they sure they want to withdraw from this process?

At this point our Elko office is kind of in a holding pattern as far as moving forward with that ecosanctuary and until we hear back from them to make sure they really want to stop.

Okay.

Questions.

>> I got a question I don't even know if you know.

The slaughterhouse in New Mexico, it's on, it's off, it's on, it's off.

There are people that have old horses that they wish they could just get rid of and maybe they'd want new horse.

I mean, if they're taking old crippled horses just hanging around and they're able to make dog food or burgers or whatever and then that opens up people that want adoption.

Do you have any information on what's going on with that down there?

>> Just what I'm hearing on the news, too.

It's very controversial.

Congress didn't approve any funding for that facility.

I don't know if it's still up and running or trying to get up and running or if it's been put on hold.

The old horses, like you are saying, are private horses, people who hold private horses.

>> Wondering if we could get more volunteers possibly out on the HMAs where the wild horses are.

I volunteer quite often where I live.

I'm close to the antelope Valley herd HMA, and I have to say those horses are in great shape in spite of the drought and everything else, and they have plenty of water.

I see to it that the water troughs are flowing.

So our area's in good shape, actually, at this time anyway.

>> Thank you for bringing that up.

I'm hoping when you get into your RAC subgroups as far as what can you do to help, if you guys could talk about watering options.

Is there ways you know, how can you help us, help us think about what things we can consider about watering animals.

I know I've had a couple folks come up to me saying my private ground, I'm willing to take horses.

It's great.

I think you need to consider the cost of taking the horses, kind of like our long term holding facilities.

It costs almost \$1.30 a day to care for one horse.

If those are options you want to talk about, BLM would definitely entertain those ideas.

So I really hope when you break out in your RAC subgroups, spend some time thinking about what ideas you can give us to consider.

If you have ideas on options for adoptions, we're interested in that.

We are forming as part of the Nevada team, we are forming up a committee of folks from the various offices to look at what we believe is a better way hopefully to market adoptions of the Nevada horses.

We're looking at getting other people outside the BLM engaged in that committee.

So if there are folks on the RACs who would like to be part of that committee to help figure out how we can increase adoption of horses, we welcome that, too.

So if that's the case, let Amy and I know whenever you have that discussion.



Over here?

>> Just a question.

>> Let's go here, here and I'll go to the back.

>> How do you reconcile the two statements that have been made this morning, one making courageous decisions, and the second one not gathering any horses from overstocked HMAs?

>> Great question.

[laughter]

We have been saying we have been seeing this issue coming for the past couple of years, that facilities were getting full, and I think the year before I showed you the gather from 2012.

Last year's number, 2013, very small percentage of numbers, and 2014 we are basically faced with a limited gathering issue.

From Nevada's standpoint, our ability to effect the change on that is harder because we don't control that.

That's at the national level.

Trust us, our national folks are truly aware of this.

And we've been pushing very hard that we have to address this issue.

We have to take care of this issue.

We've gone out at the Washington national level for requests for proposals for additional holding capacities, facilities, but because of the drought no one has bid.

We haven't gotten any interest.

So we're trying, trust us, we are really trying to do that.

And the budget has been limiting to us from that standpoint because 60% of our budget right now is definitely cost to hold those animals.

We're trying to figure out ways how we can get animals out of the facilities.

So if we can get them into those prisons, it frees up some space but we're also trying to get animals out of facilities to reduce our costs, that 60% long term holding costs of the animals so we can do more proactive things.

It's a conundrum.

We don't have space to put animals.

It's eating our budgets.

If we can get some of those animals to some other place then we'll reduce the budget to do on range stuff but we can't replace animals we remove with other animals to put back in because then it defeats the purpose of what we're trying to do as far as reduce the costs.

So it's very tough.

It's very tough.

I got one over here and then I'll come back to you and back to you.

Yes?

>> One of your remarks or goals was determine how many horses are ecologically sustainable on western ranges.

Okay.

We have HMAs now.

We have AMLs that were set up.

Supposedly this is scientific stuff was done in the past.

Are you proposing to increase the size of HMAs or go outside the boundaries of HMAs in your study?

>> Unfortunate I have not seen the Bureau's response to the NAS reports at this time but I know they have addressed that.

I would say going beyond the HMA will require a Land Use Plan amendment, we have to do public comment to do that.

Subsequently if we're going to reduce our HMA area we will have to do a Land Use Plan.

I think that's one of the things they're talking about in Washington, to do a programmatic response and what the Appropriate Management Level should be for horses.

I think our budget will weigh in heavily as far as where we can go with the horses on how many and how little.

>> But then the only thing you're going to be using for a management tool in the interim period is the decrease of domestic stock on ranges to make up the difference, right?

>> To protect the rangelands?

>> And protect yourselves from having to be responsible to take the excess horses off as well.

>> So, yes, it is truly easier for us to work with the permittees and have your cattle removed at a certain time or grazing cycle.

Definitely easier.

Because of the long term, we have no place to put the horses.

That's our big conundrum.

We have no good places to go.

I'm honest with you on this, we don't have a place to put horses at this point in time.

>> If I could one of the other comments was that with the declining number of animals and range health, what animals numbers are declining?

It can't be the horses.

You just told us they go up by 25% a year.

>> As far as right now some of horses seem to be in good body condition.

So we're talking about over the course of the year as the drought and forage and water starts disappearing we anticipate seeing horses giving into the leaner body conditions and then we'll have to address what do we do with those horses?

Once they get into that condition, the horses are either going to die on their own, make it through, and so hopefully we get some forage or water, and those are tough decisions we'll have to ask, what do we do humanely with those animals that will suffer at that point.

Did that answer your question?

>> More or less.

>> Probably less.

>> Raul, I'm really going to step out there.

As you say that there's no more room, it's on the taxpayers' back in regards to funding, making the hard decisions, Department of Interior, it is a political you know, it is a fire starter big time, but I'm going to step out there, and when you talk about I don't know if there is a humane way so far as a slaughterhouse.

If it can be somewhat I think it could be economically viable if there was a slaughter facility, and, you know, monitor the way it should be monitored, but we have an opportunity, the U.S. has an opportunity, so far as exporting to third world countries where there's a need for food, other European countries it is served in restaurants.

But it's a political fire bed, and that's where when the rubber he meets the road, those decisions to be made.

It cannot continue the way it is.

I know it's not popular.

I know there are lawsuits.

Take New Mexico

It's off, it's on.

But these decisions have to be made by the Department of Interior and because it's on the taxpayers' backs and it's not working.

So food for thought, and I know that that's probably not very popular

>> Food for thought?

>> No pun intended.

I apologize.

No pun intended.

And even talking to Tanya so far as sovereign nations, whether or not if they have the ability to get started with something like that.

Anyhow.

>> I definitely agree with everything you say.

We know it's a tough one.

And I believe this will be a year where we'll probably see more actions than we've had in past years.

It's going to require more than just the Department of Interior to wrestle with this at the end of the day.

>> Absolutely.

>> And I can say what I found out over the past year is that our sovereign nations have actually have more horses on their range than we do on public range.

So I was really surprise to do hear that, to the tune of maybe 100,000 horses on native lands.

I need to go over here first.

I see what you're doing, getting up, moving we're going to run out of chairs up here quickly.

Was there a question

>> Raul, if I understood that slide right, it showed that there was only 46 horses given fertility control last year?

>> In Nevada.

>> In Nevada.

Well, knowing there's no holding facilities to put them in [inaudible] doubling every four years, how come there isn't more fertility control being done.

>> There's definitely the plan.

That's one of the NAS report recommendations and I know Washington is like all over that trying to figure out that's why we're putting out that proposal to hopefully get the pharmaceutical companies to come up with a drug that will be more persistent over time than what we've had in the past.

Those tools we've had in the past haven't to this date brought us the effectiveness we've been looking for that the PZP is good on small horses where you can get to small herds but in the case of Nevada where we have wide ranging herds, big numbers, I don't think it's quite as effective on those herds because we just can't get to them and treat them.

In Nevada's case we focus on removing horses as much as we could last year versus treating animals.

But now we don't have that option to remove, and as far as treating animals, PZP this is the time to do it now, wintertime.

If we do it in the summertime we are wasting time.

That's not effective.

And it still requires money to do that.

It still takes a helicopter, bait and trap techniques to bring animals in in order to treat them which kind of gets into our budget question.

Here and then here.

>> Back to a far simpler question to address is the temporary watering.

If citizens were provided with, say, troughs that they could take out and put in the range and a couple tanks that would fit in the back of a pickup, people could check out for a week or so, I know that citizens would step up.

People have asked me about things like this, about our town providing the troughs and tanks.

We just don't have the budget.

But if the BLM could provide us with those tanks and troughs, we would get them out to citizens, and as far as this year, that watering problem would be solved.

>> That's a good comment to bring up in your break out sessions about figuring how can we do that.

Who provides what?

Who would actually do it?

What are the funding constraints associated with that?

And BLM managers can help talk about any other issues that might need to be addressed in order to do that.

That's what I want to hear.

>> Volunteers would do it.

It's simply matter of the troughs and tanks.

>> Appreciate that.

>> Also there's not going to be any emergency gathers?

Is that correct?

>> If we have to do emergency gathers it's going to be for public health and safety, nuisance animals, animals going onto private ground.

>> So I'm going the other way with Larry's thing about the courage.

It's going to take a lot of courage to deal with the public outcry, the massive drought and dead horses.

Is there some budget set aside for a guy that's going to do nothing but explain this to the public?

Because there's going to kind of have to be.

It's going to come to

>> Part of our summit last week we talked about the outreach, the public communications plan.

We know this is going to be big.

We want to make sure our Washington Office folks are aware of what we're going to do in Nevada.

We told our Washington Office folks Nevada can't wait.

We've got to act.

We have to do things.

We're going to give them every opportunity to say here's what we're going to do.

But don't study it forever.

We've got to take some action here.

And we delivered that message last week, and they heard us, and that's why I say, you know, the outreach internally as well as externally is just going to be a big challenge for us.

Again, and then over here, and over here.

Let me do a quick check.

Megan first.

Thank you.

>> Question: one, you talked about priority of possible removal with dealing with either drought, safety issues [inaudible] property.

Does that include other private property rights like water and those sorts of things?

>> As relates to horses?

>> Uh huh.

>> That's a good question.

>> I'll follow up with you next week on that.

>> There's a lot of private water out there and we have a lot of horses.

We're going to have to prioritize.

>> Okay.

>> We're going to have to prioritize.

>> I'll follow up with you next week on that.

One other question is relation to volunteer watering and that sort of stuff, which I think is great.

Again, that's another issue of whose water are they pumping to put in the troughs.

Is it something from town, municipalities are donating or do they own the water rights or [inaudible]

>> I would like to put it to the Tri RAC here today.

The three RACs together would like to make a statement [inaudible] to the I think it would be a very powerful statement is all three RACs in Nevada made a statement about [inaudible] having any gathers [inaudible] that it's a cowardly decision rather than a [inaudible]

>> Do you have a question over there?

>> You put a proposal to the group here.

Maybe you'll talk about it at your breakout sessions.

I know where did I leave off?

>> Just to follow up on that suggestion, which is a positive suggestion, if it would help you in budget allocation at the D.C. level, then I would certainly support doing that.

If it wouldn't, then I'm not sure what good it would do.

I mean, I wouldn't call it a cowardly decision.

I think they're in a real bind, and I understand that, but if the three RACs could send a letter to the BLM Director, I guess we've got to go through the State Director, but saying you know, just supporting that you get some funding to address the dire situation.

>> I definitely think there's value to it.

If you don't say anything, they'll say we never heard anything from you guys.

I think there is value to putting it on paper and seeing where it goes.

I think it's a good discussion, personally.

>> Raul, I know there's been a lawsuit that the farm Bureau and Nevada association [inaudible] and where the process is going to go [inaudible]

>> We've got the lawsuit filed on December 30th.

Right now our lawyers are looking at it right now and preparing a response to it, but the nexus of the lawsuit really was, BLM, you're not following the act.

You know, you're not following the act.

You need to take care of those animals.

It did point out clearly when you remove horses from the range you either sell them, you adopt them, but it says there's nowhere in the act that says you should be paying for long term holding facilities like we've been doing with that.



So basically what they're saying is that you should put those animals down if you can't sell them or you can't adopt them.

Of course, the impact to the rangeland and wildlife and private lands and all that stuff was part of it.

But in a nutshell they want us to follow the act.

So our solicitor is kind of looking at that right now and preparing a response.

[inaudible] I just thought they got it in their hands.

They're looking at it and however lawyers do their stuff.

>> I had one follow up question.

Say come April the long term holding facilities, those contracts haven't been renewed and you're short, what are some of the options BLM may be faced with?

>> Good question.

Very good question.

You know, I've been talking to Amy, Washington definitely needs to discuss with the budget we have this year what do we do in case some folks decide not to renew their contracts?

What are we going to do?

That will be definitely a topic of discussion at the executive leadership TEAM meeting in March.

But we all recognize that as being a big, big issue.

>> I just want as far as hauling water goes and stuff, I want also to say that if you're going to move these horses to outside their HMAs, in other words, you're looking for more feed, that's why you're hauling water to them, and you just want to be really careful, that you're just scattering horses.

>> That's a good point.

That's not our intent.

We don't really want to do that because horses aren't supposed to be out there in the first place.

But those also will be that case by case situation.

We have to look at what the horses are doing.

Can we put them back in the HMA?

Does water do anything if there's no forage?

That's why I say the whole watering piece is tricky.

There has to be a bridge ideally to get them from point A to point B so once they get to point B they're good.

If you're just taking care of it and there's no outcome at the end, those are some tough choices we will have to make as far as why are we watering it.

Does it just feel good we're watering the animals?

The impact of watering the animals if there is forage outside the HMA in another spot obviously impacts private land users in that area that didn't have to deal with horses in the first place.

So we want to be very cognizant of how we water horses.

>> Because we're there as a grazing, we're already in enough bad shape we don't need to move horses outside where they're supposed to be already.

>> I can talk sage grouse for the rest of my time here a little bit.

I'm not sure that will generate nearly as much as the horses if there's still more horses we can go with that.

I think sage grouse might be quick.

I think we're kind of up on that.

Okay.

>> What is your coordination with other agencies like U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service with regards to ESA species and wild horse gathering.

Are they supporting your efforts as far as trying to maintain healthy ecosystems or how is that working?

>> The Fish & Wildlife Service I know their comments they provided to us on the sage grouse EIS did talk about horses and our ability to take care of horses.

So they're very concerned about BLM's ability to manage horses within our AML level.

So they are very supportive of whatever options we can to address this issue.

With that, let's go right into sage grouse and we'll see where we're at.

As I mentioned, I'm going to talk about Greater Sage grouse and then roll into Bi State and then we can open it up for questions.

Just a quick picture of the Land Use Plans that are going to be amended by the sage grouse planning effort here in Nevada and Northeast California.

Time frames, as you guys know, the comment period closed January 29th for Nevada's, California's, Utah, Idaho's, Montana's.

Oregon is still open until February 20th.

We're looking at having a proposed RMP completed by this summer with the goal of records of decision being signed by this fall.

That would then give Fish & Wildlife Service the time necessary they need to take a look at our plans and evaluate whether or not to list the bird or not.

I should mention the Rocky Mountain states are kind of on a similar time frame, and this kind of is a big coordinated effort to get these plans together so Fish & Wildlife Service can cumulatively take a look at all the states' plans and assess the impacts of those plans to the meeting of the goal of keeping the bird and its habitat healthy.

As mentioned earlier, we have 15,000 comments on the Nevada California plan, 97% were form letters.

We are in the process of beginning that analyzation of the responses    analyzations of the responses we got.

We're hoping to have that completed by April.

And the comments in the RACs will be reviewed.

Then if we have any questions we'll be following up with you guys for clarification.

I do want to thank the RAC for their efforts in the past not only for providing comments to the plan but also help developing those sage grouse standards that we put into the plan.

So thank you very much for that.

A little bit about the Governor's alternative, it's one of the six alternatives in our draft EIS.

The state's updated portions of the state plan, we continue to engage the governor's team in ironing out some of the issues under their alternatives.

That's been very good.

We're getting very close to having agreements on where things need to be from the analysis standpoint of the plan.

So we're meeting basically twice per month with them to address topics.

We're really getting clarification on the conservation    mitigation credit system.

We're getting further clarification on what does it mean to avoid, minimize and mitigate in their plan.

So that effort is really going good and I think it's been very positive.

We have recently completed a sage grouse map with USGS's help, Dr. Pete Coats which further defined sage grouse areas in the State of Nevada, sagebrush ecosystem council of the Governor's team basically bought off and approved that map, and BLM will be looking at amending our interim management guidance that we have to use that USGS map.

So we'll be looking at updating our interim guidance and getting that out to field folks.

We have a few things we're working out with Pete Coats right now on the map.

So it's getting close to being in shape.

So next steps... public comment analysis happens February, probably early April.

Response to public comments will be coming out in April.

Cooperative agency review will occur in May.

Final EIS will be July.

Protest period and Governor's consistency will occur in July and August and Record of Decision shooting for September 2014.

This is a very aggressive schedule, and we're really trying to hold to that September '14 date because Fish & Wildlife Service is telling us they would like a year before they make their proposed listing decision in September of 2015.

So engagement from the RACs, we will continue to keep you guys updated as the EIS process continues over the next few months.

I definitely see when we get into the implementation of the plan a lot of work to be done there.

I enthuse you guys have heard me say this in the past, completing the plan is really the easy part.

It's the implementation of the plan that's going to be the challenging part.

We need to make sure we start off right.

We need to make sure we have processes in place to make sure that what we're doing on the ground is actually having a positive effect.

That's going to be monitoring.

We know folks are going to be looking at us and seeing how we're doing and seeing if we stumble out of the blocks so they can drag us back into court whether BLM or Fish & Wildlife Service.

So the implementation in my opinion is critical.

That's where the rubber meets the road.

As we get further along in the planning process and we see how things are going, I do see we'll need help with some form of the implementation.

Adaptive Management is kind of a key component in the plan.

How do we address new science?

How do we adapt based on monitoring data we're finding when we do projects on the ground.

You know, that's just going to be something new for us, we always say Adaptive Management.

We have to really mean it this time if we're going to be successful.

That's the next step.

Basically what do we do with the county plans?

We'll have the consistency check with various county plans.

Elements of Elko county plan were incorporated into the agency alternatives as well as the state alternative.

I know raven control has been a big topic, particularly in the county.

From BLM's perspective we don't hunt animals but we can do the mitigation of best management practices on our habitat improvement projects.

And that's already kind of Standard Operating Procedure for us.

So we have designed base basically put some required design features in there reemphasizing when we do habitat improvement projects they're going to make sure they don't encourage ravens or hawks or whatever to come into the area.

Some of the other alternatives we did receive were things like a hunting alternative.

Again, BLM, Forest Service don't deal with hunting, so it wasn't followed through in the draft plan.

Elko county plan mentioned about letting the bird become listed.

We can't do that.

That does not meet the purpose and scope of this EIS effort.

That was not forwarded onto the draft.

A lot of Elko county's plans were already contained in either alternative A, B or E.

So there is a lot of their stuff in the plan.

There was a proposal to increase grazing.

Again, we don't have any science that says increased grazing is going to benefit the bird or its habitats.

And I talked about the predation part.

A lot of stuff, particularly Ravens, as far as why there's so many Ravens, the state has better control, local government has better control of that, whether it's land pits, removing dead animals off the highways.

Those aren't BLM action items.

So I know those agencies are aware of those things.

So that's where I think we'll make a lot of progress on dealing with that.

Bi States, again to show you where the hash mark is basically the California Nevada stateline there.

Bi State, genetically distinct population of the Greater Sage grouse.

The comment period on the draft Bi State sage grouse plan that the Humboldt Toiyabe forest has the lead on closed January 17th.

As mentioned earlier when Amy was talking the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has extended their comment period on the proposed listing decision of the bird and identification of critical habitat until February 10th.

These are the planning documents that will be basically amended by this planning effort.

Basically everything but the Bishop, California RMP Resource Management Plan.

That plan basically the conservation measures they have in the plan, Fish & Wildlife Service are saying is adequate at this point.

So they're not doing a plan amendment.

As mentioned earlier we had 170 comments on the Bi State, which surprised me, not that much.

But the general themes from those 170 comments centered around range management, OHV restrictions, locatable/leasable minerals, livestock grazing and the economic effects.

Next steps... again, we'll be analyzing comments and developing a comprehensive response to the comments.

Late spring, early summer the BLM and Fish & Wildlife Service will be completing the plan.

And then the Record of Decision is being scheduled for completion this September.

We are continuing with working with the local area Working Group.

They have been very instrumental in developing the action planned and helping prioritize those treatments that need to be done within that action plan.

Their efforts have resulted in a budget that we Fish & Wildlife Service says that if we can get roughly 30 million bucks over the next 10 years to address Bi State actions that would be very favorable as they go through their listing proposals.

So what the executive committee and the agencies are doing, now that we know that figure, the Fish & Wildlife Service has kind of said 30 million over the next 10 years seems like a good place to start from a budget standpoint.

We've raised that level up for all agencies, not just BLM, Forest Service, NRCS, Washington Office folks to hopefully secure that budget starting next year.

So we kind of raised the flag this is what it's going to take.

We're going to continue to leverage funds with our existing partners.

There's a lot of private mix in the Bi State country.

A lot of important habitat on the private grounds that is needed for the Bi State.

We've had a lot of willing landowners working with to secure some conservation easements with them.

We'll continue to do that.

Of course, we'll continue to look at a landscape level approach on how we deal with the Bi State across stateline.

So any questions?

Yep?

Questions on sage grouse?

>> Back to the [inaudible]

Letters that have been received, presumably a big chunk of those are form letters or check a card kind of thing.

That aside, it suggests there's a substantive volume of comments.

What mechanisms is the Bureau using [inaudible] and the staffer involved to ensure those comments are adequately considered [inaudible]

Credible amount of work in a very short period of time and [inaudible]

>> Good question.

The good news, about 15,000 comments, in the fact most were form letters.

Kind of got it, right?

It was like 2,000 of them say the same thing, we don't need to look at all 2,000.

I don't know at this point of those 15,000 how much were kind of individual substantive comments but definitely a much smaller percentage.

So that's what we work with.

We work all the different comments we got.

It's not a numbers game.

But all the different substantive comments we got and analyze that and work through that.

I was actually surprised it wasn't more than that, honestly.

So I think it's a very doable, but again to meet that aggressive schedule it just means all hands on deck to go through all those comments, individual substantive comments, and make sure we have addressed all of them.

So I do think it's doable.

>> [inaudible] I think the Elko board an excellent letter, and from my life experience it's factual and the recommendations are definitely valid.

Tuesday Nye county declared the raven as nuisance bird.

As a predator on the sage grouse.

And a step to help stabilize and increase or reduce the threat to the sage grouse population.

Do you consider this a viable means of a viable remedy?

>> So since the raven is protected by the Migratory Bird Act, they'll be working with Fish & Wildlife Service on that one.

Again, from BLM's perspective, that's just not in our purview from the management perspective.

So no doubt probably Fish & Wildlife Service are engaged in talking about that.

That just came out this week?

>> At the Tuesday morning meeting.



>> Anything else?

>> Raul, just kind of a process question... from what you just indicated, the Record of Decision for [inaudible]

>> Correct.

>> I don't remember exactly, but I think the Service is mandated to make their decision sometime in 2015, summer of 2015.

>> September of 2015.

>> September 2015.

Do you know, are they going to look at these distinct areas like Nevada, northeastern California, are they going to look at the whole? they have to somehow look at the whole thing because the act says that the animal has to be threatened in all or a significant portion of its range.

So do you know if they're going to, I guess, look at them all at the same time?

>> That's why we want to make sure we get all our planes both in the Great Basin states and Rocky Mountain states finished kind of close to the same time so that Fish & Wildlife can take all our plans and look at it from the range wide perspective.

Fish clearly said in the past all states have to come across with a palatable plan that's going to work.

It can't one state does good and another state does bad.

However, they're also letting us say that the states high on their list they're watching are Nevada, Oregon, Idaho and Wyoming.

Those are the key states that really need to make sure we do a good job with it because that's where the biggest habitat and populations of birds are at.

So we know the Nevada plan based on what I'm hearing out every comments on Fish & Wildlife Service on our plan, the Nevada California one, we did a pretty good job with our alternative B but we still have a little more work to do.

Anything else?

>> I have one.

A big part of this, I mean, this projected date for the Record of Decision, comes right about with your budgeting time and your new year, fiscal year.

I mean, we see all over the place that you don't have a lot of money to do a lot of things.

This is going to require a lot of money, you know, a lot of manpower, because if you don't have the monitoring backup for things I mean, are you having an all hands on deck approach to going after the budget?

I mean, it's going to be a key component to this because you're not going we are that's where it's all going to matter once this goes through.

>> That's a good point.

I should mention the Fish & Wildlife Service PECE policy.

What that policy does is Fish & Wildlife Service has to respond to when they make a listing decision, one, they have to look to see if a plan for a species has adequate regulatory mechanisms.

In our case of the bird we're talking about the sage grouse EISs.

They're going to review that, provide their comments and make sure the conservation measures and amount of habitat we're protecting are adequate.

That's check one.

Check two, and where they've lost, Fish & Wildlife Service has lost lawsuits in the past, in the past they would say if that plan on paper looked good, and they say good enough for the bird, we don't need to list it, they have lost lawsuits because the judges have said how do you know that plan will be implemented.

That's why I say implementation is the harder part of the thing which is a budget picture.

So basically the judges told Fish you have to also consider the budgetary resources that are going to be brought to the table to implementing the plan.

It's a two step process.

PECE is a two step process.

Definitely has been elevated up.

Definitely I think Fish & Wildlife Service is going to want to see a commitment from the agencies in the fiscal year '15 budget towards meeting the plan.

So that definitely has been brought to the top.

Back in Washington they're talking about FY '15.

That's what we do in Washington, is budget projections all the time.

That's another good comment.

If the RAC wanted to address that a little bit, I think it would be very beneficial.

I see a hand over here?

Fish issue on time?

All right.

So if there's nothing else, I think we'll take a break.

How long do you want?

Until 10:30.

Then we'll talk about recreation related stuff.

You can catch me during the break if you have any other questions.

Thank you.